"SOUTH BAY BESSIE"
A Monster in Lake Erie

by Ron Schaffner

A Listing Of The Alleged Sightings

Lake Erie's western basin has become a host of yet another aquatic serpent in the world. Not surprising as the student of cryptozoology is aware that the majority of these inhabited inland waterways within the northern hemisphere lay claim to some sort of monster.

There have been many explanations to the sightings; most notable is the prehistoric sturgeon, which can easily grow up to 300 pounds and have been known to reach 20 feet, 200 pounds and 100 years old. However, it must be noted that it is bottom fish and rarely seen on the surface. But, how often could one see a serpent?

"South Bay Bessie," as dubbed from a local contest has stirred quite a wonder in northern Ohio since the mid 1980's. The battle lines have been carved from the believers and skeptics alike. "Monster-mania" has taken hold in all the local communities. (A more than familiar common thread with all Fortean events of this type.)

John Schaffner, editor of the Ottawa County Beacon (no relation to this editor) has been the focal point of data collection with his toll-free hot line. I wish to thank him for the material he has sent along to us. His hot-line has produced reports dating back 30 years .

The majority of reports depict the same basic description: A 30-50 long snake-like about as round as a bowling ball. The reported creature seems to appear when the water is calm.

So, without further oration, let us begin the listings of "Bessie." We will have no further comments on origin or explanations.

1960

Ken Golic was fishing off a pier in Sandusky when he heard two rats. He decided to throw a couple of rocks at them when he saw the creature. He stated that it was cigar-shaped and came out of the water about 1-1½ feet. It was about 11:00 PM on a clear, calm night.

1969

Jim Schindler stated that a serpent came within six feet of him near South Bass Island. Although he did

not see the length, the width was about two feet. The animal appeared to be about one foot under the water.

September 1981

Theresa Kovach of Akron saw a snake-like reptile that "was so large that could easily capsized a boat. It seemed to be playing." She watched it from a house on the Cedar Point Causeway.

1983 (year approximate)

Mary M. Landoll told John Schaffner about her encounter with Bessie off Rye Beach in Huron. Mary went out to the front porch just before dawn when the lake was quite placid. From the left end, she heard a rowing sound and saw what looked like a capsized boat. It was a greenish-brown color about 40-50 feet in length. Landoll realized that it wasn't a boat, but an animal of some sort. It had a long neck and an eye was visible on the side of the head with a grin going up one side The creature appeared to be playing in the water, but still put a scare into the witness.

Summer 1985

Tony Schill of Avon, Ohio was boating with friends north of Vermilion when they reported the serpent. It was dark brown and had a flat tail. Tony stated that "five humps came out of the water. No way it was a sturgeon."

Dale Munro of Lorain was also boating when he came face-to-face with it. He stated that it had three humps and was black. He also reported that it was twice the size of his 16-foot boat. The location was in calm waters just off the Lorain Coast Guard Station and his sighting lasted three to four minutes.

May or June, 1989

Gail Kasner obtained a graph from a boat owned by Ken Smith of Streetsboro. The fishfinder appeared to show a sonar reading of a cigar-shape apparition about 35 feet in length at a depth of about 30 feet.

July 8, 1990

Susan Seeson, of Salem witnessed the creature two miles from Cedar Point. Her description basically matched other reports.

September 3, 1990

Bob Soracco was jet skiing off Port Clinton when he thought he spotted a porpoise. (Porpoise in fresh water? Oh well, Bob had just moved from Florida.) He told reporters that he saw humps with gray spots. "It was very long as I moved closer and it was going down."

September 4, 1990

Harold Bricker and his family were fishing north of Cedar Point Amusement Park when a serpent-type creature swam by their boat about 1000 feet away Their description - 35 feet long with a snake-like head. It moved as fast as their boat. Later, the Brickers reported their sighting to the ODNR rangers at East Harbor State Park.

September 11, 1990

Fire inspectors, Jim Johnson and Steve Dircks of Huron, saw the creature from a third story window facing Lake Erie. They described it as dark blue or black at about 30-45 feet long. He further stated that he saw three parts of the creature above water. "It laid there motionless for three to six minutes and was flat on top."

Week of September 16, 1991

Dennis Szececinski, of Toledo saw Bessie near Toledo's water intake structure three miles offshore in Maumee Bay. He was fishing in the bay when something long and black slithered in front of him.

References: